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RESEARCH PAPER

OTHER LIVES

by

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Photomedia

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of the work undertaken
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Summary of work presented for examination and abstract of paper

Abstract

The areas of investigation are the portrait, the gaze, the American filmmaker Errol Morris, representation of reality and subcultures. These are discussed within an historical, technical, cultural and social framework.

Colour, the film theorist Bill Nichols, the filmmaker Errol Morris are discussed with reference to the central gaze and what constitutes reality. Taking on another identity, the role of subcultures and my influences as a photographer are explored within this context.

Work for Examination

Other Lives is a photographic work consisting of portraits including:

- civil war re-enactors who believe that the war between the northern and southern states of America still exist
- Elvis Presley impersonators and fans who believe that Elvis Presley still lives
- people who take on another identity as scarecrows in the context of a local festival
- people who take on another identity as medieval knights.

Introduction

*This is my real life*¹

In the essay from Chauncey Hare's monograph titled *Interior America*, Hare wrote about the split between his working life as a petrochemical engineer and that of a photographer, "*In some fashion, acquisition of the view camera was symptomatic of the growing schism between my life as a discontented engineer and as an emerging photographer. That year I began vomiting in the mornings*".²

This statement connected with my own feelings about life as a public servant with the NSW Department of Education and Training. The schism between the job and my work as a photographer was one of the reason for undertaking the MVA. Hare's dilemma and mine were the same. The need to create another life or world to deal with the difficulties of life is a common thread within society that may lead to the creation of subcultures.

My research concentrates on the events and festivals that allow people the opportunity to take on another identity. Within this context the person maintains a level of privacy that is not evident in the work of the photographers that are discussed in this paper. This is the primary difference between *Other Lives* and the work of Chauncey Hare, Diane Arbus, August Sander and Richard Avedon.

Other Lives consists of portraits of people involved in subcultures, something outside of their working lives as accountants, administrators, lawyers, truck drivers and fathers. The act of photographing people in their other life or reality, the one that many describe as 'their real life,' is the focus for my work.

¹When photographing Elvis Presley impersonators, I asked "*What do you do in real life?*" This was the answer.

²Hare Chauncey, *Interior America*, Page 14

The research paper consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 Background Historical, Technical, Cultural and Social Framework

1. This chapter explores the work of photographers Chauncey Hare, Diane Arbus, August Sander and Richard Avedon and the influence they have had on my work.

The work focuses on the fantasy of taking on another identity or persona within the context of group events. Subcultures are identified and explored from a social, cultural and religious perspective. The group event provides a safe harbour to express a more personal aspect of their lives that may ordinarily be private.

Chapter 2 Conceptual and Technical Influences

2. The notion of reality in the context of this paper is defined as what people believe or create is their reality. The work of the filmmaker Errol Morris and the writing of the film theorist Bill Nichols who has written extensively on the theory of representing reality in documentary film provide a theoretical context for the work. Technical innovations such as Errol Morris's Interrotron™ and Megatron™ are discussed as they are integral to my interest in the gaze and portrait.

Chapter 3 Other Lives

3. The paper concludes by examining the way early influences, researching the work of photographers, filmmakers and writers, have clarified the way in which I work through the academic process.